

#231 JOSEPH LOCKARD: OPANA RADAR

Steven Haller (SH): My name is Steve Haller and I'm here with Harry Butowski at the Waikiki Park Hotel in Honolulu, Hawaii. It's December 8, 1991, at 9:25 p.m. and we have the pleasure to be interviewing Mr. Joseph Lockard. Mr. Lockard was a Private, a nineteen-year old Private in the Signal Company Aircraft Warning Service, Hawaii, and he worked at Opana radar station on the fateful day of December 7, 1941. So we would like to thank you very much for coming and talking with us, Mr. Lockard.

Joseph Lockard (JL): My pleasure.

SH: Good. Let me start by asking you how you got into the Army and how it was that you began to do work for the Signal Corps?

JL: Well, I enlisted in the Army on August 16, 1940. I was sworn in at Harrisburg, Pennsylvania and the intent was to go to Hawaii, but it wasn't necessarily my intent, at the time, to be in the Signal Corps.

SH: Why go to Hawaii . . .

JL: Well, we wanted to go overseas and that was brought about by the fact that one of my boyfriends had an elder brother who had just returned from a tour of duty in the Philippines, and he had all these wonderful stories to tell. And he fired us all up. So since school was out and in that particular time in our area, there was very little to do. The war had not yet accelerated the economy, why, we went down to enlist. It's ironic that the boy whose brother got us all interested in this flunked the physical.

So two of us, John Albright, who is now deceased, and myself, went on to be sworn in at Harrisburg. And then we went from there, of course, to, by train to Fort Slocum. Now, Fort Slocum is an island off of New Rochelle, New York, and at that time, that was the port of embarkation for overseas Army personnel. We were there for a couple months and we were moved then to Fort Wadsworth, on Staten Island. Of course, by now, we thought we were never going to get there, as time was passing and we still hadn't got on a ship. We actually left the United States in November of 1940. And we took the scenic route and went down through the Panama Canal.

At that time, the Army ran their own transport service, the Army Transport Corps. They had their own ships, which were mostly converted merchant man. And we went down through the canal and up to 'Frisco and then across to Hawaii. We arrived there in early December of 1940.

SH: What duties did you assume when you got to Hawaii?

JL: Well, when we got there, there was a new company recruiting people right down on the boat, before we landed. And this was the Signal Company Aircraft Warning. And we decided that that sounded pretty interesting so we signed up. We were taken off the boat and shepherded onto a narrow gauge railway that ran up to Schofield in those days, taken by train to Schofield and by truck to the company. And that's where we were for the next six weeks, incommunicado with the rest of the world.

SH: What kind of training did you receive?

JL: Well, we had had a great deal of basic training back in the States, but they do, did it all over again, you know, typical Army fashion, when we got to Hawaii.

SH: Specifically now I'm driving at, the training that you began to receive for . . .

JL: Well . . .

SH: . . . in the operating, the Signal Corps operation.

JL: As I said, we, we joined this organization in early December of 1940 and the Signal Company Aircraft Warning was a company with a mission, but no equipment. They then proceeded to train us in field communications and actually it worked out pretty well because we had daily classes in radio theory. Everybody bought a George radio physics and we all studied that. We also studied the standard communications code and field radio operation.

SH: When were you first introduced to the radar equipment?

JL: Well, the radar equipment arrived on the island of Oahu in late July of 1941. So you can see we were quite a while without a lot of equipment. But as I said, we were studying information that was germane to what we intended to be doing. And there were six radio sets, as they were called, SCR270Bs. They were portable units that were then positioned about the island. And on the job training began.

SH: So it was then that you, did you get, did you get to work on that radio, the radar, which you referred to, as you say, as radio. Did you get to work at it at Schofield or . . .

JL: Well, yes, it, well, no, we started at Schofield. But organization -- incidentally, I went there today, to see if I could find the location. Of course, it's greatly changed, but we did find where the old barracks was. It was originally -- oh, it may have dated back to World War I, for that matter. It was a wooden barracks and that was where we were quartered. It was a couple of miles above the, toward Kolekole Pass from the theater at Schofield.

SH: Could you possibly the name the number of the barracks?

JL: Oh, it wasn't, no, there was no number. We were, we were actually out of the main post area. You know, there was the quadrangle area down there where the 19th Infantry and the 27th Infantry and the 21st Infantry, was located. This was on the road between there and Kolekole Pass, and had been, at one time, a chemical warfare barracks. It even worked into that. The equipment was, the first unit was set up right there, and that's where we began our first training on the equipment.

SH: One thing that Harry and I are quite interested in is did your training encompass the overall -- did you get any indoctrination at all into the overall system in which that unit was a part of, or was your training limited to the operation of the system?

JL: Well, obviously . . .

SH: . . . radio?

JL: Yeah, you had to begin somewhere, you had to begin first with being able to operate the equipment. So the equipment, the operation of equipment was the first priority. And, of course, we still, at this time, now you have to remember, even though we had equipment and started to set it up and get it into operation, we had no information center yet.

SH: Did you ever visit the information center?

JL: Oh yes. I had been in the information center. The information center was being built, of course, but there was a sort of simultaneous effort in training, and in building the information center. The information center was located at Fort Shafter. Actually, between the main highway and the sea, down on that side, there was a number, a number of ammunition bunkers down there. And one of these was converted and built up into -- I have pictures of them, the building, when it was partially constructed. The soldiers built it. It wasn't built by outside contractors, the GIs built it.

SH: That is something that would be nice to share with . . .

JL: Those pictures should be available and there's a great deal of information available that I think you and I had talked about before. You could get it, I think you can probably could get it through, Merle Stouffer, easier than -- I think Bradburd has it, but Merle should be able to get it for you. It was all collected by Harry Hilton.

Harry Butowski (HB): One thing I'm interested in, when you got the equipment, started training on it July and August. At that time, did you, with your fellow trainees, conceive any threat to the Hawaiian islands? Was it explained what it is you're doing and what it is that you're trying to protect?

JL: Well, we knew what, we knew what the purpose of the equipment was, of course, and to detect aircraft and of course, eventually, if necessary to detect enemy aircraft. But there was no hint that we were close to war with the Japanese, or with anybody else for that matter. We knew there was a, we knew there was a war going on in Europe before I even joined the service. And we knew that was, that was going on. We also knew the Japanese had been fighting in the Orient since 1935, you know, when they first went into Manchuria. But that was pretty remote, and I don't think anybody really thought that we were close to warfare, certainly not at our level. Now, obviously, privates are not privy to higher echelons' information. But the grapevine wasn't even carrying anything of any significance.

HB: Tell us when you first came to the Opana site and the conditions you found there.

JL: Well, I first went to Fort Shafter for a while -- you know the locations of the units.

HB: Well, why don't you tell us the locations of the units.

JL: Well, the, the six units were placed around the island. There was, of course, one at Schofield, at the bases there. It was primarily for training.

There was one at Kaaawa, and one at Koko Head. One at Fort Shafter, one at Waianae, and one at Kawaialoa. Now -- and one at, as I said, Koko Head. Now, it's interesting that all of those units, with the exception of the one at Koko Head, were nearly at sea level. The one at Koko Head, of course, was about six hundred feet and that one performed, probably, better. There was really not a very good understanding of the optimum positioning of this equipment.

HB: So you, you trained at Fort Shafter?

JL: I went from Schofield to Fort Shafter, and then in October, part of September and October, and a little bit, maybe, of the first part of November, I was at Koko Head. In fact, I was there on September the twenty-seventh when we had the exercise with the Navy and we readily picked up the planes as they took off from the carriers, eighty miles off shore. It was a very good demonstration. But then I went back to Fort, to Schofield.

HB: Excuse me, is Koko Head not the Opana site?

JL: No, no. Koko Head is, you know, Koko Head is the point just beyond Diamond Head as you go east.

HB: Okay. Why, when did you leave Koko Head?

JL: Well, I left Koko Head in early November, I think, and went back to Schofield. Well, then the unit at Schofield was moved to Opana in late November, in fact around Thanksgiving time, and I went with that unit. But we were quartered at Kawaialoa, where there was another set, with the men there and the unit was positioned up at Opana, and that was, I said, around Thanksgiving time. So that it was only there maximum of two weeks, although probably a little less than two weeks before December the seventh.

HB: Is that where you first met George Elliott . . .

JL: Yes. I had never known him before. He would, he had transferred into our organization from the air corps, as I understand.

HB: So when you went to Opana, you were really one of the more knowledgeable people of that radar unit.

JL: I certainly was one of the, one of the oldest operators. Yeah.

HB: You had been working with it ever since it arrived in the islands.

JL: That's right.

HB: How many men would normally be in the Opana station when it was in operation? Describe that to us.

JL: Well, of course, since we weren't operating around the clock or anything like that, I think there were maybe six, six of us. That would be -- two men were to a shift were what we usually worked with, because you needed one to operate and one to plot. We operated at sometimes early in the morning and sometimes late at night, but generally through the daylight hours.

HB: Colonel Tetley indicated to, to me that usually there were three men to a shift. There was usually one man operating the generating equipment.

JL: Well, you really didn't have to operate that. You turned it on, you know, and it ran. It was a, it was a motor generator set and a rectifier was in that van. Once you fired it up and got it set, you really didn't need a person on it. Of course, you had to remember to put some more gas in it, if it ran do. But we weren't running around the clock. Maybe the three men, when we did run around the clock, you would, more, be more likely to have three.

HB: Who were, who were the other people that were working at Opana with you? Do you remember?

JL: Well, I don't remember it all, but McKenney was one of them, and . . .

HB: There was George.

JL: Yeah, George, but . . . I really, I really don't remember their names.

HB: Okay, why don't you describe the events of the morning, of December 7, when the Japanese attacked. And before you get started, were you on duty December 6, the day before?

JL: I don't remember working on the sixth, I may have, but I can't be sure. We went up late in the afternoon of the sixth. You see, I probably wasn't because that was a Saturday.

HB: Yes.

JL: We generally had Saturday afternoons off and Sunday after, and Sundays off. And we, but because we were not quartered at the location of the radar, and because the program was going to start at four a.m., well we went up late Saturday afternoon and stayed there overnight. And there were no facilities up there. If you wanted a drink of water, you'd better take a canteen, because there wasn't any there. And we had a pup tent we stayed in, try to get a little sleep overnight, and an alarm clock, if I remember right, to get us up at four. And, of course . . .

HB: So the morning of December 7, four a.m. . . .

JL: The morning of December 7, four a.m. . . .

HB: . . . fire up the generator . . .

JL: Right.

HB: . . . and then there then were just two of you there?

JL: Yes.

HB: You were the only two assigned.

JL: Yes. See, it was a Sunday and McKenney tells me this story and I'm not sure I remember that part, but he said the way I got there was that first he and Winterbottom -- now, Winterbottom was on the, was one of the crew chiefs on

the unit that was located at Kawaialoa. First, they flipped a coin and McKenney lost, to see who was going to get this duty. And he flipped with me and I lost. Now, he says that, but I don't remember that, but he does. You know, everybody remembers different things.

HB: Did you have a third man assigned to the unit that morning?

JL: No, no. It was just myself and Elliott.

HB: Okay. And you fired up the equipment at four . . .

JL: So we fired up the equipment at four o'clock and of course, the people were in the information center and the plotter had a headphone that he was wearing that was a direct land line communication with the plot, his plotter on the board and the information center. And we continued to operate until seven o'clock.

HB: Did you have any contact with him?

JL: Well, I'm not sure if we had any, it couldn't have been more than one or two. ON the, on the plot -- I used to know, I haven't gone over that in a long time. But you'd have to check and see if there was any dates that was, or any times that was prior to 7:02, but then again you might get confused with something the next day, because I think they, when they came back up and reopened the unit, they continued to plot and they may have even used that overlay the next day. I don't know for sure.

HB: There seems to be a point of confusion about the information on the overlay. It's very clearly marked the incoming flights and there are a number of other flights, on the portion of the information we have that records the flights the plotter would write down. There are plots before seven. However George Elliott believes that those were plots were made the day before. Do you have any information on that?

JL: No, I can't say with any certainty. But I don't know why they would be there the day before. We generally tried to change overlays every day, I don't -- I can't say one way or another. I don't remember anything specifically about that.

HB: Okay. Why don't you continue to tell us about the events of the seventh?

JL: Well, okay, we, of course, the program was over at seven o'clock and normally we would have closed the unit down, but George needed to learn how to run the equipment and so we decided we'd stay open. Actually, there wasn't any way for us to get away from there anyway. There was no truck to take us back to base camp.

So I was starting to give him instruction on the operation when this thing appeared on the scope. Of course, it was a very unusual indication, having never seen more than a couple planes at any one time on this equipment. You know, there wasn't a great deal of air activity around the island, normally. So the very unusual nature of the pulse caused us to notice it and I didn't know whether it was something wrong with my equipment, or whether it was really a flight. But it only took a minute to find out that all the dials

seemed to be reading correctly and everything seemed to be operating correctly, then you have to assume that it truly is there.

HB: So what did you do then?

JL: Well, we watched it for a little while, and, but we plotted it.
But . . .

HB: Excuse me, at this point, you were looking, you were operating the scope and George was acting as the plotter.

JL: Yes, mm-hm. Well, yeah, because when we first seen the thing, you know, he was sitting there in the seat and he said, "What's this?"

And I said, "Well, I don't know."

Then he got up and I sat down and said, "You know, I'm going to fiddle with the knobs and see what's going on here."

And then I stayed there and he just started to track it and plot it because, you know, that was really good training then. But we didn't have any idea what it was, of course. But it was so unusual that George called -- he couldn't get anybody on the plotting line because everybody was gone. He had another land line that was connected to the switchboard in the information center. And the switchboard was being manned. So he called down and Joe McDonald was on the switchboard and said, you know, "Is anybody around?"

And he said he didn't think there was but he'd look and see. So he looked around and found Kermit Tyler, he called us back and I talked to Kermit Tyler.

HB: What did you tell him?

JL: Well, I described the unusual nature of it and the direction from which it was coming. But of course, you know, it's sort of like helping your grandmother sort strawberries over the telephone. You know, he couldn't see what we were looking at. And I'm not sure he ever had even seen the scope. So (coughs) excuse me. He couldn't be familiar with the equipment, or, or understand what we were seeing. I would say that would be true.

HB: At that point, did you have any feeling or knowledge of a possible Japanese attack on the island?

JL: No, no. There was a lot of high-level stuff going on, but, you know, you gotta remember our position. We were . . .

SH: Excuse me, did Lieutenant Tyler question you about what you saw? Do you remember what he . . .

JL: Well, I don't remember the exact words that took place, but I do know that we (coughs) excuse me. We -- that would be a great help, thank you. We, I know he understand what I was trying to say to him. I said, you know, here's this thing that goes clear up to the top of the screen and it's this wide and it's coming from almost true north.

And he, of course, and I didn't know it -- and he didn't tell us at that time -- but in his mind, there was a possibility that it could be the B-17s that they expected in from the west coast.

HB: So what, what did he tell you?

JL: He just said, "Don't worry about it."

And I think we pushed it as, as far as you could, but you know, an enlisted man to an officer, you can't.

HB: Colonel Tetley told me that (JL coughing) among the enlisted men in the company, betting on which day the Japanese would attack the islands. Did you have any knowledge of that?

JL: I have never heard of that before this, before this conversation that I, we were in the van, you know, I heard it then, and that's the first I ever heard of that.

SH: Also, in terms of the conversation of that day when you visited the site, I recall one of you remarking about some of the patter that went on as you were tracking, as you were tracking the flight. Do you recall anything that . . .

JL: No, you didn't hear that from me.

SH: . . . in a joking nature about that.

JL: No.

SH: What was your mood then, as you were tracking . . .

JL: I think it was just curiosity more than anything else. I don't recall anything else, but (coughs) . . .

SH: George, George, as I recall, just said, obviously then it was George and I recall him saying something to the effect of perhaps it was a homing pigeon with a band on it, or maybe a mosquito.

JL: Oh. I have no, I have no recollection of anything like that.

HB: Okay, Joe, why don't you tell us now the time concept when you used the incoming flight of planes and then you shut down the equipment, correct?

JL: Yeah, well, we plotted it and followed it into the interference that appeared on our scope. You understand that the interference is a function of the back reflection from the antenna. It interferes with the forward reception and that extended in the case of the direction that we were pointed at that station, at that time, about twenty miles. And of course, once we lost the echo in the, in the interference, there wasn't much else for us to do.

HB: When did, when did you learn that . . .

JL: That was about seven -- I think on the plot it says 7:39.

HB: No, when, when did you actually learn that the islands were under attack?

JL: Oh, not until we got down to Kawaialoa, really. On the way down, the truck -- we closed the place down. The truck showed up about that time anyway. It was a six by six, standard Army transportation. And we got in the truck and started down. It was a dirt road from Opana down to the main road, which was macadam. We got down there and we were down, going down the macadam road when we were passed by our other truck, a state body truck, if I'm not mistaken -- the one that used to carry the, used to carry the bays that were fastened to the antenna -- with all the rest of our crew, and they all had their sidearms, and they were waving and shouting, but they were going quite fast. And we couldn't understand, we couldn't understand what they were saying. And it wasn't until we got to Kawaialoa.

HB: When you got then you knew immediately, what . . .

JL: Oh, as soon as they told us that we were under attack, we knew what we had seen.

HB: I think at that point, you and Elliott were in possession of some very important information. You knew the direction of the Japanese carriers. Did you realize the significance of that information?

JL: I doubt if we did, frankly. We were very excited about -- well, everybody was excited. You know, here we're under attack, you know. And I think excitement is the best word that I can think of to use. We told everybody, "Well, listen, hey, we, you know, we, that's what we saw coming in," and we may have said where the direction they were coming to, but we were telling the people that could have used that information anyway.

SH: Did you report back then to your senior officer?

JL: I think, I think I remember that I told it to [2nd] Lieutenant Caceres, Ralph Caceres was, I believe, fairly recently assigned to our company. He was a national guard officer from, from the islands here. And I think I told him, I think I remember telling him.

HB: Now, we're running out of time very rapidly. I want to ask you, when you returned to Opana, the set was up and operating . . .

JL: Yes.

HB: . . . and did you get on the scope and track the planes . . .

JL: Well, the other, the other fellows were working the set. I'm not sure, I don't think I worked any more that day.

HB: As far as you know, did the Opana track the planes back to the carriers.

JL: They may have tracked some of the, the flight around there. I don't know if they got any of them on their way back to the carriers or not. I don't believe they show up on the plots anywhere. There is more airplanes appearing on the plot, but I don't recall any large number of them heading in any one direction.

HB: Very briefly, as we wind up, it's fifty years of the time of the event. Any thoughts today on how it's impacted you from the perspective now from fifty years.

JL: Well, I think that it's, it's one of those little footnotes in history that people like to play what-if games with. And I think the most interesting what-if game of the whole thing is what if the planes on the Japanese carriers, carriers had taken off fifteen minutes earlier. You see the implication there, they would have been right in the middle of our program. People would have been manning the information center. The observers would have been in connection with the, with their people, and maybe they could have got a little more aircraft, anti-aircraft protection.

HB: Certainly an interesting question. Thank you very much.

SH: Thank you, Mr. Lockard.

END OF INTERVIEW